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C O N F I D E N T I A L ANKARA 001405

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/SE, NEA/IR

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: GOT OUTLINES AHMADINEJAD VISIT

REF: A. ANKARA 1368
[1](#)B. ANKARA 1379 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) BEGIN SUMMARY. Iranian President Ahmadinejad will visit Turkey August 14, in what the GOT is describing to us as a "working visit." He will travel only to Istanbul -- not Ankara -- where he will meet with President Gul and, most likely, PM Erdogan. The visit has not been officially announced and no specific program has yet been decided; Iranian Deputy FM Sheikh-Attar and a sizable advance team will visit Ankara August 6 for meeting preparation. Based on the composition of Sheikh-Attar's delegation, the Turks believe the Iranians wish to focus on energy. The GOT is not predicting any breakthroughs with the Iranians, but believes every country with influence on Iran should be doing its best to persuade Iran to respond positively to the refreshed P5/1 offer and enter into substantive negotiations on its nuclear program. Turkey, the GOT emphasizes, is not seeking to mediate between the P5/1 and Iran. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) MFA DDG for South Asia and Iran Babur Hizlan told us that the GOT, after months of pressure from Tehran, decided to offer Ahmadinejad a "working visit" -- not a state visit -- on August 14. An overnight and August 15 program is possible, but has not yet been scheduled; the Iranians are notorious for changing plans at the last minute. According to Hizlan, President Gul was already scheduled to be in Istanbul. Plus, meeting there helps the GOT avoid the inevitable controversy of the Iranian leader not wishing to visit Ataturk's mausoleum, Anitkabir. Turkish media nonetheless seized on reports the trip would exclude Ankara because of Ahmadinejad's refusal to pay homage to Turkey's founder. FM Babacan stoked the controversy August 4 by commenting that the substance of the visit should be the focus and not "minor details." Hizlan said Ahmadinejad's unwillingness to lay a wreath at Anitkabir was an obstacle to his coming to Ankara, but noted that, despite the press hysteria, there is precedence for such a visit: former President Iranian Rafsanjani visited Ankara without calling on Anitkabir. Protocol aside, by scheduling it in the middle of August and steering clear of the capital, the GOT hopes to give Ahmadinejad's visit a lower profile, though Hizlan agreed the Iranians will try to hype it. Hizlan reminded that previous Turkish President Sezer visited Iran in 2002, during the Khatami presidency (the last presidential visit between the two sides), but then refused to reciprocate an invitation to Ahmadinejad. Gul finally invited the Iranian president, but would only accept this "working visit" formula.

¶3. (C) An Iranian protocol team is traveling to Istanbul and a large advance team led by Iranian Deputy FM Sheikh-Attar is visiting Ankara August 6 to prepare for the Ahmadinejad visit. Based on the composition of Sheikh-Attar's delegation, Hizlan believes the Iranians wish to focus on energy. A wide range of other subjects will likely be discussed, including the nuclear issue, border management and security, and regional (Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iraq) affairs.

¶4. (C) We reiterated the points in reftel, arguing that scheduling the visit now will contrast negatively with Iran's failure to respond clearly and positively to the refreshed P5/1 offer and its continued defiance of the international community. Hizlan said a political decision on the visit has been made. In any case, there has never been a good time for Turkey to host Ahmadinejad, suggesting MFA, at least, will be happy to get this visit finally over with. Turkey did not consider conditioning Ahmadinejad's visit on a favorable response from Tehran to the refreshed P5/1 offer, but Hizlan suggested subsequent high-level exchanges might be conditioned on such progress. While Turkey is the first NATO country to receive Ahmadinejad bilaterally, it is the only NATO country neighboring Iran, he underlined.

¶5. (C) Hizlan stressed that Turkey wants a negotiated, diplomatic solution to this crisis and would try its best to convince Iran to accept the existing, P5/1 mechanism; the GOT neither supports nor plans to introduce any new mechanism. He emphasized that Turkey has no intermediary role between Iran and the P5/1; even Tehran has denied explicitly such a role for Turkey. According to Hizlan, every country with influence on Iran should be using it to try to persuade Iran to respond to the P5/1 offer and enter into substantive negotiations. He noted that France had reportedly implored the Syrians to do the same thing.

¶6. (C) The GOT is hopeful but not optimistic that it can realistically persuade Iran to at least freeze its existing enrichment program. Hizlan believes the Iranians want to enter into negotiations, but are so far only willing to talk about talking. Hizlan believes suspending nuclear enrichment is a major hurdle for Iran: it has a built-in suspicion of any and all potential nuclear suppliers, Russia and Turkey included, and is not convinced the United States would ever allow it to be treated as a regular NPT country, with a right to civilian nuclear technology.

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